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AUGUST 2026
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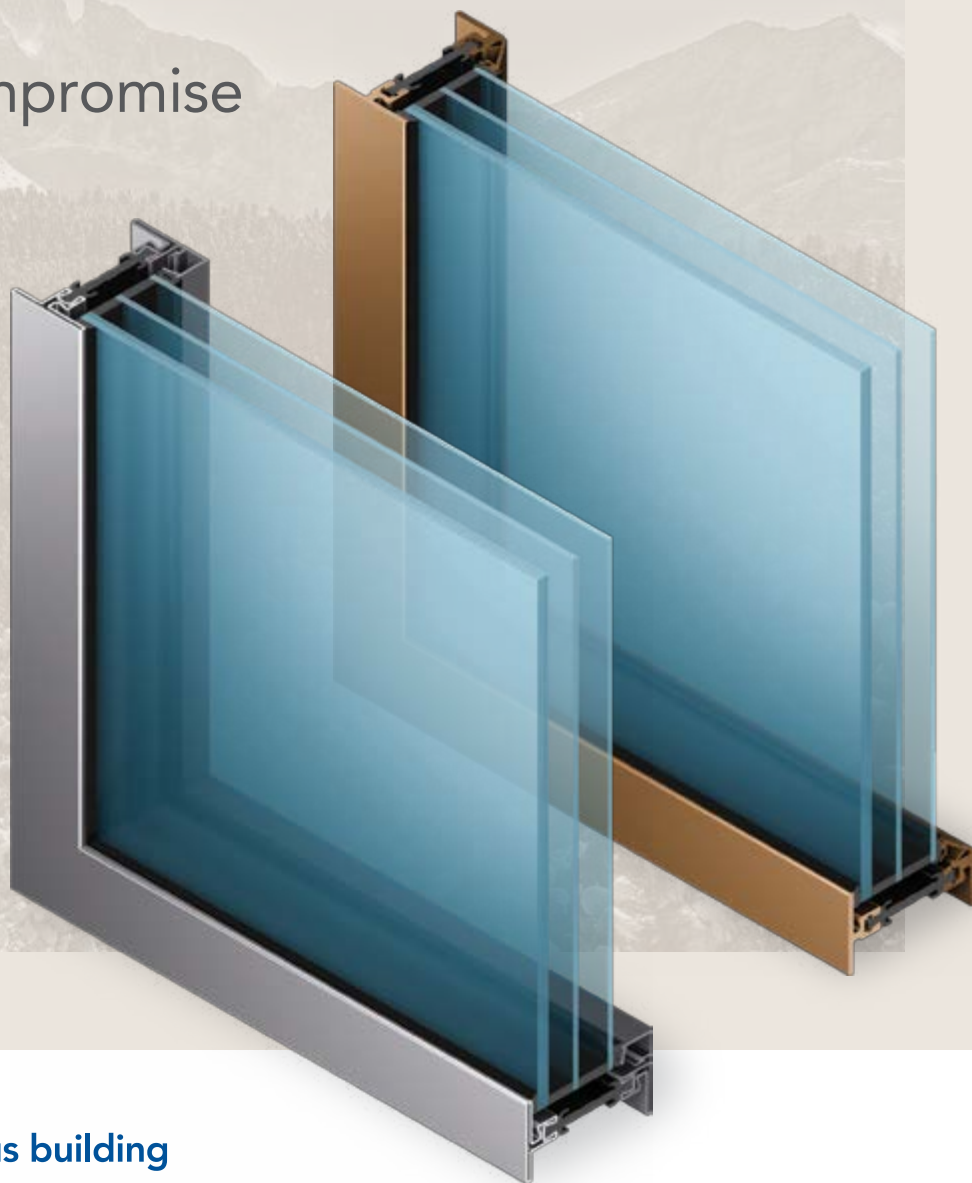
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PHOTO COURTESY SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

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Editor's Letter

AUGUST 2026

Back to Campus...Ready or Not!

If your campus feels a little busier this month, you're not imagining it. Parking lots are filling up, residence halls are buzzing, landscaping crews are putting the finishing touches on campus grounds, and somewhere a facilities director is looking at a project schedule and wondering how August arrived so quickly.

Welcome to Back-to-Campus season.

For those of us who work with colleges and universities, August always brings a renewed sense of energy. After months of planning, construction, maintenance, and improvements, campuses across the country are preparing to welcome students, faculty, and staff for another academic year. It's a reminder that the work you do every day has a lasting impact on the campus experience.

Of course, every facility professional knows the unwritten rule of August: no matter how well you plan, someone will remember a "small" project that somehow became urgent yesterday. Whether it's a sidewalk that suddenly needs attention, an athletic field that requires one more pass with the mower, or a residence hall that discovers a plumbing issue the week before move-in, you've learned that flexibility is just another job description.

The good news is that you make it happen.

This month's issue of *Private University Products and News* is dedicated to helping you start the school year with ideas, products, and solutions that can make your campus safer, more attractive, and more efficient. Inside, you'll find articles covering campus grounds, landscaping equipment, facility improvements, outdoor spaces, maintenance strategies, and innovative products designed specifically for higher education facilities.

One of the greatest privileges we have at PUPN is hearing directly from the professionals who keep America's private colleges and universities operating at such a high level. Every conversation reminds us that campus excellence doesn't happen by accident—it happens because dedicated people are willing to solve problems, often before anyone else even notices they existed.

As summer winds down and another academic year begins, I want to personally thank you for allowing PUPN to be part of your professional resources. Whether you've been a reader for years or this is your first issue, we appreciate the opportunity to bring you information that helps you make informed purchasing decisions and discover new ideas for your campus.

On behalf of everyone at Flaherty Media and the PUPN team, thank you for your continued support. We wish you a successful, productive, and hopefully surprise-free start to the semester. (Although, if you've worked in campus facilities for more than a week, you already know that's probably asking a little too much.)

Have a wonderful month, and thank you for everything you do to make your campuses exceptional places to learn, grow, and succeed.

Ed Bauer, Publisher
Private University Products and News Magazine
ed@pupnmag.com



Ed Bauer
Publisher/Editor-in-Chief
ed@pupnmag.com

Christian Erkhart
Regional Marketing Director

Denise Loyed
Regional Marketing Director

Rosalind Fournier
Copyeditor

Jake Rasmussen
Creative Director

Cynthia Mwenja, PhD
Staff Writers

Commercial Zone
Libby Ferin
Contributing Writers

Circulation
circulation@pupnmag.com



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Empowering Community Change through Story Circles and Theatre at Salve Regina University

BY CYNTHIA MWENJA, PhD

Tara Brooke Watkins, assistant professor and director of the theatre arts program at Salve Regina University (SRU), collaborates with communities to create theatrical productions that emerge from the communities' own experiences and needs. At each step throughout the process, participants experience positive—often life-changing—impacts, demonstrating the profound potential of theatre for engendering meaningful personal and social change.

Power of Theatre

Watkins performed as an actor throughout her childhood, and she continued focusing on theatre arts for her college career. She eventually realized, however, that she wanted to do more with theatre than represent only one person's story on stage—though at the time she did not have any models for professional alternatives beyond being an actor or director. What Watkins did know was that she had two goals for her theatrical career: helping people to become more capable, while simultaneously helping them feel less alone.

When Watkins enrolled in Emerson College's MA in Theatre Education program, she began to encounter approaches which could help her reach her goals. In working with Robbie McCauley—a visionary and multi-talented professor, scholar, and performing artist—Watkins gained both a mentor and a friend who taught techniques of devising plays informed by story circle interactions. Story circles are guided opportunities for groups to share personal experiences relating to a common theme. These techniques

allow the people involved to engage in actively listening to one another. The possibilities of this powerful combination of deep listening and sharing real narratives were life-changing for Watkins; she began to anchor her own playwrighting method in this impactful practice. Watkins has now repeatedly seen how this approach to theatre can help people truly interact with one another throughout the script development process—and be changed by their shared experiences at every point.

Story Circle Theatre

Watkins' process for developing shows includes many threads woven together for the final product. Each production is grounded in deep research on the community and subject at hand. Once she has begun to assemble that information, she then further cultivates her relationship with the community she will be working with, always prioritizing the community's needs and desired outcomes.

When Watkins begins facilitating story circles for the project, she first leads participants in community-building exercises, then offers a conduit into circle work by reading a

story related to the topic at hand. As Watkins notes, the conduit itself shows each participant that they are not alone; someone else has shared some aspect of their own life experiences. The story also provides the context for participants to answer a question related to the theme the group is working with, such as "When has your story been changed by others?" or "When has someone stolen something from you?"

Once a volunteer answers the question first, sharing turns pass around the circle from there. Participants are asked to hold any judgements they have in response to others; no one asks questions or interrupts, and everyone is asked to avoid preparing their own story when someone else is talking. After everyone who wishes to speak has their turn, then space can be opened for cross talk; at that point, everyone feels safe and honored, having been heard without judgement.

After each story circle that Watkins holds with community members, she has them participate in theatre exercises so they have

a chance to process the emotions that may have come up during the circle time. These exercises are tailored to each particular circle experience and might include activities such as a positivity mirroring exercise, a tableau, interview pairs, or writing a monologue in another circle participant's voice. Watkins often later learns that people have made big, positive life changes as a direct result of their participation in story circles and the subsequent theatre activities.

Watkins draws on all of these community interactions to develop a script, then casts and directs the show, ultimately performing it for the community from which it emerged. As she is developing the production, she is also asking the community what they would like people to be inspired to do in response to attending the performance; audience members receive information so that they can join in working for change after the show closes. The price of admission is often tailored to the production, as well. For a piece focused on PFAS (forever chemicals), they accepted Teflon pans and

microwave popcorn bags as "tickets." For a play centered on unhoused people, admission was a package of socks. Her goal with each production is that it will create real, positive, and lasting change in and for the community.

Storytelling Theatre Productions

Watkins has used her methods to produce several plays, with more currently in development. Themes of her work span a variety of vital human issues, including gender identity, homelessness, environmental concerns, race relations, and more. In 2014, Watkins wrote the first iteration of The Bible Women's Project, which she continues to re-work through ongoing story circles with young, predominantly Christian women. The circles and performance focus on the effects that traditional church experiences have had on women's understanding of themselves and their roles as women. Watkins states that hearing other women's stories often gives participants the courage to risk sharing their own, even on difficult topics that they have never previously discussed. She appreciates

the authority that the play has with Christian audiences due to its grounding in Biblical history.

For Watkins' doctoral work in her hometown of Tulsa, she wanted to find ways to help heal the huge divide in the city between Black and White people, as well as finding ways to tell the story of Black Wall Street and the Tulsa race massacre from Black perspectives. Because she was determined to ensure that community needs would guide the project, she carefully researched that history. She also taught drama in a grant-funded position at the Greenwood Cultural Center, which focuses on Black Wall Street and Black entrepreneurship; in this role, she wrote and directed an original play for students in the summer arts program to perform.

After gathering data and getting to know people in the community, Watkins approached community leaders with the idea for the theatrical production, basing it in story circles which—while focused on Black

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Tulsans' experiences—were attended by Tulsa residents of varying racial backgrounds. The groups discussed race relations in the city, which is still functionally segregated; all of the participants had genuine questions about the history and situation that they had never had the opportunity to ask. While such discussions could easily result in conflict if mismanaged, Michelle Burdex, Program Coordinator and Cultural Architect at the Greenwood Cultural Center, affirms that Watkins created a “welcoming, authentic environment in which all participants felt truly safe asking and answering questions.” Burdex points out that Watkins gained the community’s trust before proposing the project; that was what allowed the process to be successful.

Once the group was assembled, Watkins set the stage as the discussion facilitator for the months-long series of story circles, emphasizing that the group’s goal was to develop understanding of one another. Even though the conversations were often challenging, everyone was committed in good faith to fully

absorbing what others said. After taking in accounts from Tulsa massacre survivors, the group began sharing their own stories about how each member had experienced racism. Burdex felt heard when she shared that they are still discovering the truth and coming to terms with the massacre and what was lost. The mass graves investigation is currently ongoing; bodies have been newly identified even now in 2026.

Burdex states unequivocally that working with Watkins and participating in these story circles changed her life. She attributes the transformative quality of Watkins’ work to her humble attitude, kind personality, and transparent approach; these characteristics allow and invite participants to be honest in return. Burdex recalls that she saw change happening for the participants through their shared experience of being in the circle together; everyone returned to their communities with new understanding of and compassion for one another. While Burdex appreciated the theatrical production that came out of the process, it was the story circles for her that were the

most powerful part of the experience—and the part that led to the most lasting change.

Watkins highlights how the play “became a bridge” for diverse audiences. A prominent Black leader pointed out in the post-show talkback that the performance had brought them all together, concluding, “that’s why we need the arts.” Additionally, ticket revenues were given to the Greenwood Cultural Center to help fund a museum regarding the massacre; the weekend’s box office raised \$15,000 toward this initiative. All of these results show the variety of transformative outcomes that theatre can bring about.

Working with Students

Emma Corcelli, 2026 SRU graduate, deeply appreciates Watkins’ approach to teaching theater, noting that she uses the way each student best learns to help them grasp the material. Corcelli values how profoundly Watkins influenced her view on theatre; their work together ultimately led to Corcelli’s decision to become a theatre educator herself. In fall 2026, she will begin working as a



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Kindergarten teacher, with the goal of establishing a theatre arts program at her school.

As a student at SRU, Corcelli used Watkins' devised theatre techniques to conduct a year-long community engagement and education program at a local middle school. She ran acting workshops, led storytelling circles, and guided group discussions, then used those experiences to create a play for the young actors. As a result, Corcelli reports, she now thinks of "everything in that way—as listening and responding" to a community.

Victoria Gonzalez, assistant professor of Sociology at SRU, says that she and Watkins share a "desire to do more for the community as agents of social justice." One way they each do so is through SRU's Commission on Mercy Culture, which Watkins currently chairs. According to its website, this body promotes SRU's mission "by turning empathy into action"; it "responds to individuals' needs by actively listening and seeking solutions that foster inclusivity." As Gonzalez puts it, the group strives to "meet real needs in real

continued...



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time.” One concern she brought to Watkins was that of the multiple challenges students were navigating in relation to social media. Following their in-depth conversation, Watkins decided to dedicate a devised theatre class to the idea the following term.

Watkins and her class used her powerful script-development process to create an immersive production entitled *A Social Media Carnival*, which examines the ways that social media can work to keep people separate and “in their own heads,” as Watkins says. Each audience member was able to choose a track—that of a first-year student, an LGBTQIA+ student, or a faculty member. As audience members itinerated through the performance venue, the actors at each station performed specific scripts for each of the audience’s roles. The production was so well-received in March 2026 that Watkins has been asked to revive it for new student orientation each year. She notes that this request shows that people recognize the power for change that this type of theatre holds.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Cynthia Mwenja teaches Composition and Rhetoric at the University of Montevallo.

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Building Cleaner Campus Spaces Through Better Waste & Recycling Design

BY COMMERCIAL ZONE

Waste and recycling receptacles are easy to overlook until they fail. When receptacles are hard to find, poorly labeled or not suited to the environment, the effects show up quickly: litter near entrances, contamination in recycling streams, overflowing containers. All of these failures result in added work for your valuable facilities teams.

For private colleges and universities, waste collection is part of a larger campus operations strategy. Trash and recycling receptacles must support daily student activity in residence halls, academic buildings, dining areas, athletic facilities, outdoor gathering spaces, alumni event spaces and public-facing facilities. The right system keeps spaces cleaner, supports sustainability goals, improves maintenance efficiency and helps preserve the look and feel of the campus.

The most effective waste programs begin with a simple idea: Receptacles are part of the campus infrastructure. They guide behavior, communicate standards and influence how people treat shared spaces.

A trash container near a building entrance may solve one immediate need, but it can create another if recycling is not placed nearby. A recycling container may be ignored if the opening does not match the material being collected. Outdoor containers may look appropriate when installed, then weather poorly if the material is not suitable for sun, rain, snow or heavy use.

Campus leaders should aim for visual consistency without forcing each space to use the same receptacle. A library, stadium concourse, residence hall lobby, dining area and outdoor quad have different requirements. Still, students and visitors should be able to recognize the system wherever they

are. That requires clear labeling, colors and strategic placement across locations.

Here are tips that academic campuses should keep in mind when selecting waste and recycling systems for their spaces.

Plan Around Real Campus Behavior

Waste and recycling systems work best when they are designed around how people actually move through campus.

High-traffic areas need receptacles where disposal decisions are made: near entrances and exits, food-service areas, vending locations, event spaces, residence hall common areas, parking areas and outdoor pathways. If a visitor is forced to walk across a courtyard to find the right receptacle, the odds of proper disposal decline and the chances of littering increase.

Capacity planning also matters. A quiet academic corridor may need a different container than an athletics facility after a game or a student center during lunch. Overflowing

receptacles create litter, odor issues, pest problems and negative impressions. They also force facilities teams into reactive cleanup instead of predictable maintenance.

Before updating receptacles, campuses should perform a comprehensive waste audit, review traffic patterns, collection schedules, event calendars and known problem areas. The best choice is not always the largest container; it is the container that fits the space, the waste stream, capacity need and the maintenance routine.

Multi-Stream Systems Support Sustainability Goals

Many campuses are upgrading basic trash and recycling collection to multi-stream systems that may include landfill waste, compost or mixed recycling such as paper, bottles and cans. These programs can support sustainability goals and reduce landfill-bound waste, but only when the system is easy to

understand.

A strong multi-stream setup should feel unified. Containers should be physically grouped together for clear, efficient disposal of multiple items at a time. Decals and panels should be highly visible, simple and consistent, utilizing both words and icons. Receptacle colors, decals, lid shapes and openings should reinforce each stream to help users make faster decisions while also bypassing language barriers.

Unity is especially important on campuses because the audience changes constantly. First-year students, visiting families, conference attendees, contractors and alumni may all use the same spaces. The system cannot assume familiarity. It has to communicate quickly.

Capacity options matter here, too. A narrow multi-stream system may work

well in a hallway where space is limited. A larger outdoor system may be necessary near a dining patio, campus green or stadium entrance. Modular multi-stream systems can help colleges adapt the number of streams and container sizes to each setting while keeping the overall look consistent.

Indoor & Outdoor Spaces Require Different Choices

Indoor receptacles are often selected for appearance, footprint and ease of maintenance. In academic buildings, residence halls and administrative spaces, leaders may prioritize clean lines, compact profiles and designs that align with interior finishes.

Outdoor receptacles face more demanding conditions. They must withstand harsh weather conditions, UV exposure and temperature swings. In some locations, they may also need to resist graffiti, dents, rust or movement from wind. Canopy lids can help

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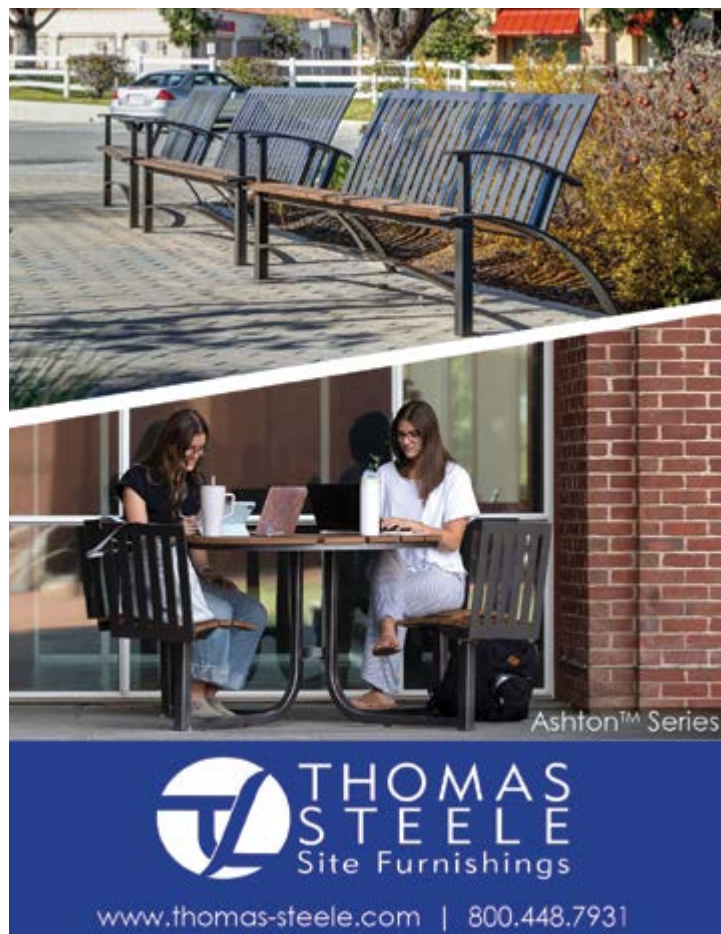
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protect contents from rain and snow, while larger capacities may reduce service frequency in high-use areas. Containers that utilize a flipper lid can keep water and pests out while preventing trash from blowing in windy conditions.

Material selection should follow the environment. Polyethylene can provide durability for many outdoor settings while resisting fading. Steel or stainless steel may be preferred where appearance, weight or architectural fit are priorities. Recycled plastic lumber can support durability and sustainability goals in outdoor gathering areas. Outdoor materials are not one-size-fits-all, and the best material depends on placement, exposure, expected use and maintenance capacity.

Durability is a Sustainability Strategy

Sustainability is often discussed in terms of recycling rates and landfill diversion, but durability deserves equal attention. A receptacle that needs frequent replacement creates more material waste, more procurement activity and more disruption for facilities teams.

Long-lasting materials can reduce total cost of ownership while supporting environmental goals. The EPA's waste management hierarchy places source reduction and reuse

above recycling, which makes product lifespan an important sustainability consideration. A durable receptacle helps reduce replacement cycles before recycling is even necessary. The right receptacles can also help your campus receive more points towards Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) goals.

Maintenance should be part of the sustainability conversation as well. Receptacles that are easy to clean, easy to empty and appropriately sized for the location can reduce labor demands and help keep spaces looking cared for. Over time, those operational details can matter as much as the initial purchase.

Personalization Can Improve Clarity & Campus Fit

Personalization is often viewed as a branding feature, but for campuses, it can also serve a practical purpose. Logos, colors, decals and custom messaging can help receptacles feel integrated into the environment while making waste and recycling instructions clear and consistent.

A university may want receptacles that match campus colors or designs that reflect the space's visual identity. Consistent designs that can be deployed across multiple buildings create a cohesive campus appearance.

Custom solutions can also help when standard products do not fully match the space. A historic campus, newly renovated student center or high-profile outdoor plaza may require a more tailored approach than a stocked solution can provide. The key is to use personalization and customization to support both appearance and function.

Questions to Ask Before Selecting Receptacles

Before purchasing, campus teams should consider these questions:

- What waste streams are being collected now, and what streams may be added later?
- Where are the highest-traffic disposal points?
- Where are facilities teams frequently cleaning up litter?
- Do indoor and outdoor spaces require different materials, lids or capacities?
- Are trash, recycling and compost containers grouped in ways that make sorting intuitive?
- Can panels or decals be understood quickly by students, staff and visitors?
- Will the design hold up to weather, cleaning routines and heavy use?
- Does the system support the campus's sustainability, appearance and maintenance goals?
- How may personalization help appearance and the on-campus experience?

Thoughtful trash, recycling and compost receptacle selections reduce visible litter to reinforce campus standards. With proper receptacle planning and regular evaluation, campuses can support sustainability goals and improve operational efficiency all while aligning with campus colors and branding.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Commercial Zone creates waste and recycling solutions that balance durability, sustainability, appearance and site-specific needs. Products include multi-stream receptacles, outdoor cigarette receptacles and customizable options that can incorporate logos, colors and brand elements. Learn more or browse site furnishing options by visiting commercialzone.com.

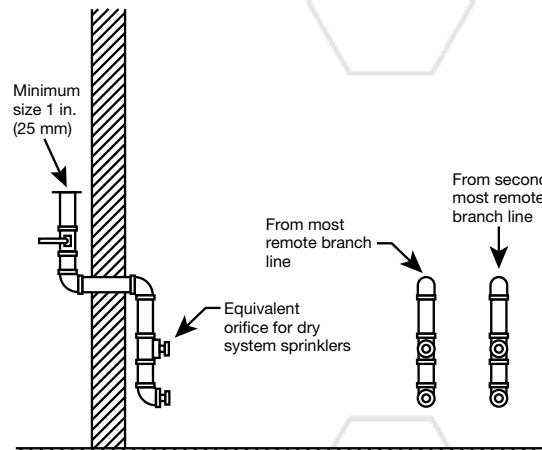
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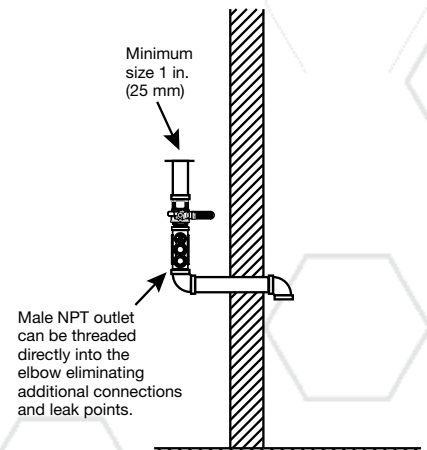
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What to Prioritize When Choosing High Performance Campus Mowers

BY GRASSHOPPER MOWERS

For private colleges and universities, the appearance of the campus is often the first impression prospective students, parents, alumni, and visitors have of the institution. Maintaining beautifully manicured lawns, athletic fields, and landscaped gathering spaces requires more than a skilled grounds crew—it requires selecting equipment that delivers productivity, reliability, and exceptional cut quality across a wide range of terrain.

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To help facilities and grounds professionals make informed equipment decisions, PUPN sat down with Brent Dobson, Government & National Fleet Accounts Manager at Grasshopper Mowers, to discuss the key factors universities should consider when investing in commercial mowing equipment. From choosing the right mower configuration and power source to evaluating long-term operating costs, operator comfort, and year-round versatility, Dobson shares practical insights drawn from decades of experience working with institutional grounds managers across the country.

Whether your campus is replacing a single mower or planning an entire fleet upgrade, Dobson offers expert guidance to help maximize productivity, protect turf quality, and achieve the lowest total cost of ownership while maintaining the professional appearance today's campuses demand.

PUPN: What impact does varying turf and terrain have on selecting a mower?

Dobson: A university campus is not one property—it's a dozen different mowing environments sharing a map. Manicured quad lawns that define the institution's first impression sit next to athletic fields with their own turf-health standards, ornamental beds that demand tight, careful trimming, retention-pond banks and hillsides that test stability, and rough perimeter areas where durability matters more than finish. Add tight spaces around walkways, bike racks, benches, and landscaping, and it becomes clear that no single machine configuration is ideal for everything. The right question isn't "which mower?" but "which mix of mowers, and which configuration for each job?"

This is where deck position and machine type matter. Grasshopper builds three configurations, each suited to different parts of the campus:

- **MidMount zero-turns** put the deck between the axles for a compact footprint and nimble handling—ideal for open lawns, athletic fields, and areas where you want maximum acreage per hour with a tight turning radius. The 400D MidMount, for example, can mow up to 7.2 acres per hour.
- **FrontMount zero-turns** carry the deck out ahead of the operator, so it reaches under low branches, shrubs, fence lines, and playground or bleacher edges that a mid-deck can't. The out-front deck also follows ground contours well, which helps on undulating turf and around ornamental areas. FrontMount is also the platform that unlocks year-round attachments (see Q7).
- **Stand-On mowers** shine in tight, gated, or obstacle-dense spaces—courtyards, areas with frequent on-and-off for gates or debris, and trailering-heavy routes—where a compact, highly maneuverable platform saves time.

The practical takeaway for a grounds director: match the machine to the terrain rather than forcing one machine to do everything. Many campuses run a MidMount or two for

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open acreage, a FrontMount for contoured and hard-to-reach areas plus off-season versatility, and a Stand-On for tight zones. Slopes and rough terrain also argue for a low center of gravity and stable, wide stance—both Grasshopper design priorities—and for talking through your specific slope conditions with a dealer before buying.

PUPN: What power source best fits a campus' operational goals?

Dobson: Power source is one of the most consequential—and most overlooked—decisions in a campus mower purchase, because it touches fuel cost, noise, maintenance, and even where and when crews can mow. Grasshopper offers gas (including EFI—electronic fuel injection—for better fuel economy and easier starting) and diesel across much of the lineup, so the decision can be made on operational goals rather than on what's available.

For universities, diesel deserves a serious look. Grasshopper offers Kubota Clean Diesel engines across MidMount (e.g., 325D, 400D), FrontMount (e.g., 700 and 900 Series), and Stand-On models. The case for diesel on a campus:

- **Fuel efficiency and cost per hour.** Diesel engines typically deliver more work per gallon and hold up well under the sustained, high-load mowing a large campus demands, which improves cost per acre over a long season.
- **Longevity and duty cycle.** Diesel engines are built for long service life under heavy, continuous use—a good match for institutional fleets that run daily through the growing season for years.
- **Torque for tough conditions.** Diesel's low-end torque handles tall, wet, or heavy growth and slopes without bogging down.

It's also critical to consider the noise factor. Noise is a campus-specific consideration that's easy to overlook. Grounds crews often have to mow around active classrooms, dorms with sleeping students, libraries, exam periods, outdoor events, and early-morning windows before foot traffic picks up. Sound level affects when and where you're allowed to run equipment.

Quieter operation widens the daily mowing window and reduces complaints. Ask your dealer about sound levels for the specific engine and configuration you're considering and weigh EFI gas and diesel options on noise as well as fuel cost.

The bottom line: choose power source based on total operating cost, your daily noise constraints, and duty cycle—not sticker price alone. Grasshopper's breadth of gas, EFI, and diesel options means a campus can standardize



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on the power source that fits its goals.

PUPN: How well does the mower protect turf quality and campus appearance?

Dobson: For a private university, the grounds are the brand. Prospective students and their families form an impression in the first 90 seconds of a campus visit, and well-kept lawns signal an institution that pays attention to detail. A cut that looks merely “fine”—with streaking, scalping, clumping, or uneven stripes—quietly undercuts that message. This is not a place to settle.

Cut quality comes down to deck engineering, and it's a genuine Grasshopper differentiator. The DuraMax all-steel decks are the product of years of airflow research: extra-deep 5.5-inch cutting chambers create the airflow that lifts grass to stand tall before it's cut, producing a cleaner, more even finish and better clipping dispersal or collection. Better airflow is the difference between a lawn

that looks professionally maintained and one that looks merely mowed.

Turf protection matters as much as appearance, especially on athletic fields and irrigated show lawns. Points worth making:

- Zero-turn maneuverability means fewer passes, less overlap, and cleaner lines around obstacles—less repeated wheel traffic on the same turf.
- Consistent deck performance across varied conditions (dry, damp, tall) keeps quality uniform so the whole campus looks intentional, not patchy.
- The ability to switch cutting modes—standard side-discharge, mulching, or collection—lets crews choose the approach that keeps a given area healthiest and cleanest (see Q7).

The mower deck is the single biggest driver of how the finished campus looks. Investing in a deck engineered for cut quality protects

the institution's most visible asset.

PUPN: What is the total cost of ownership and expected return on investment?

Dobson: The purchase price is the number everyone sees, but it's rarely the number that matters most. Total cost of ownership (TCO) over a machine's working life includes fuel or electricity, routine maintenance and labor, replacement parts, downtime, depreciation, and resale value. A mower that costs less up front but burns more fuel, needs more service hours, or spends more days out of commission can easily cost more over five to 10 years.

It's wise to build a simple cost-per-hour or cost-per-acre model rather than comparing sticker prices.

Where Grasshopper strengthens the TCO and ROI case:

- **Productivity (the biggest ROI lever).** Faster, wider, more efficient mowing means fewer labor hours to cover the

continued...



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same acreage—and on most campuses, labor is the largest line item in grounds budgets. Machines like the 400D MidMount and 900D FrontMount mowing up to 7.2 acres per hour directly reduce the hours needed to keep the campus cut.

- **Fuel efficiency.** Diesel and EFI options lower fuel cost per acre over a long season (see Q2).
- **Lower maintenance burden.** Grasshopper designed for serviceability: MidMount models have only five lubrication points and FrontMount models fewer than ten, cutting the time and labor spent on routine upkeep. Fewer service hours mean lower cost and more uptime.
- **Durability and long service life.** Heavy-gauge formed-steel decks and robust commercial engines are built to stay in service for years, spreading the purchase price over more mowing seasons and supporting resale value.
- **Versatility as an ROI multiplier.** A FrontMount that plows snow, sweeps, and collects leaves in the off-season earns its keep year-round instead of sitting idle (see Q7).

The bottom line: Evaluate mowers on cost per acre over the full lifespan and on the labor hours they save—not on purchase price. On those terms, a productive, fuel-efficient, low-maintenance, durable machine often wins clearly even at a higher initial cost.

PUPN: What safety and operator comfort features are included?

Dobson: Crew safety and comfort aren't soft benefits—they're productivity and retention issues. A comfortable operator mows longer with better focus and fewer errors, and reducing fatigue and vibration lowers the risk of strain injuries over a long season. On a campus full of students, pedestrians, and events, safety is also about protecting people around the machine.

Grasshopper's operator-focused features give the writer concrete, specific points:

- **Suspension seating that fights fatigue.** Premier suspension seats offer adjustable lumbar support, ventilated (front-to-rear airflow) cushions to keep operators cool, and suspension tuned across a wide weight range (roughly 100–375 lbs) so the seat fits the operator, not the other way around.
- **Vibration and shock control.** A low center of gravity plus integrated multi-point suspension dissipates the jolts of uneven ground, and an iso-mounted, shock-absorbing footrest adds legroom while reducing knee and leg fatigue.
- **Adjustable, accessible controls.** QuikAdjust tilt levers let operators customize their reach over a 9-inch range to reduce strain, with "Tall Boy" control levers available for taller operators—a real benefit when multiple crew members share the same machine.
- **Built-in safety.** A retractable seat belt with an interlock switch is part of the operator station, and the low center of gravity supports stability on the slopes and banks common on campuses.

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Ergonomics keep crews healthy and productive across a full mowing season, and a well-designed operator station is an investment in the people who maintain the campus—not just the machine.

PUPN: How reliable is the equipment, and what dealer support is available?

Dobson: For an institution, downtime during peak growing season isn't just inconvenient—it means a visibly unkempt campus and crews idled or pulled onto slower backup equipment. Two things determine whether that happens: how reliably the machine holds up, and how fast the dealer gets you running again when service is needed.

1. Optimizing reliability and serviceability:

- **Built for commercial duty.** Heavy-gauge, robotically welded formed-steel decks (spindles anchored in a six-bolt

pattern to spread impact force) and commercial Kubota, Rehlko/Kohler, Vanguard, and Kawasaki engines are engineered to hold up under daily institutional use.

- **Designed to be easy to maintain.** Few lubrication points (five on MidMount, fewer than ten on FrontMount), a standard PowerFold deck on FrontMount models that lifts for quick blade changes and underside cleaning, and easy engine access (raise the hood on liquid-cooled models; rear clutch access on horizontal-crankshaft engines). Easier maintenance means it actually gets done — and done faster — which drives reliability and uptime.

1. Choosing the right dealer—arguably the most important factor, and one buyers often give too little weight:

- **Quality dealers:** Grasshopper sells

exclusively through a worldwide network of vetted, independent dealers chosen for product knowledge and service capability. A knowledgeable local dealer is the difference between a same-week fix and a machine down for a month.

- **Commercial warranty:** Most Grasshopper products are backed for commercial use, with a three-year limited warranty—parts and labor in years one and two, parts only in year three.
- **Lower operating cost.** Grasshopper has competitive OEM parts and reduced service points compared to other brands, making maintenance simple and replacement parts affordable.

Before buying, evaluate the dealer as carefully as the machine. Ask about parts availability, typical service turnaround during

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peak season, loaner or priority options for institutional accounts, and the dealer's track record with other universities or large grounds operations nearby.

PUPN: Can the mower adapt to multiple campus maintenance needs?

Dobson: A mower that only mows sits idle for months of the year. On a campus with a tight equipment budget and limited storage, a machine that works across seasons delivers far more value and consolidates what crews have to buy, maintain, and store. This is one of the strongest arguments for choosing a platform built for versatility from the start.

Grasshopper's FrontMount platform is designed exactly for this, and it's the centerpiece of the answer:

- **QuikConverter implement system.** Grasshopper's exclusive QuikConverter lets crews swap the

mower deck for another attachment on any FrontMount power unit in minutes, with no tools and no alignment hassle—so the same machine changes jobs quickly instead of being a single-purpose mower.

- **Year-round attachments.** The FrontMount line supports a full range of implements: snowthrowers, V-plows, dozer blades, rotary brooms, and winter cab options for snow and ice work; plus leaf and debris handling and other implements. A machine that mows all summer can clear campus walkways and lots all winter.
- **Cutting-mode flexibility.** Grasshopper decks convert between standard side-discharge, down-discharge mulching, and PowerVac collection, so crews can mulch to feed the turf, bag for a manicured finish, or collect leaves in the fall—matching the method to the area and season.

The takeaway: Think of a mower purchase as a year-round equipment decision, not a summer one. Ask what attachments a platform supports, how quickly implements swap, and how many separate machines one versatile unit can replace. On a campus, a FrontMount that mows, mulches, collects, sweeps, and plows can do the work of several machines and justify its cost across all four seasons.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Founded in  Kansas, Grasshopper is a family-owned, innovation-driven manufacturer of American-made zero-turn mowers. Since introducing its first mower in 1969, the company has remained committed to engineering excellence, operator comfort, lasting performance, and dependable dealer support worldwide.

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FACILITIES & MAINTENANCE

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Great Campuses Don't Begin with Furniture. They Begin with Intention.

BY LIBBY FERIN

Furniture isn't the finish line of a project. It's the beginning of every experience that follows.

Before the professor says a word...Before students open a laptop...Before the first discussion begins...The environment has already started teaching.

Without saying anything at all, the environment communicates expectations. It tells students whether this is a place to listen or participate. Whether collaboration is encouraged or independent focus is expected. Whether movement is welcome or staying put is the norm. Every space teaches. The question is whether it's teaching intentionally.

For decades, conversations about educational furniture have centered on specifications, finishes, budgets, and lead times. Those are all important considerations, but they aren't where great learning environments begin. They begin with a much simpler question. "What is this space designed to do?" Not just on opening day. Not just this semester. But throughout its life.

As campuses evolve, programs expand, technology changes, and teaching methods continue to transform, can this environment continue to support the people who rely on it every day? That question changes everything. Because once purpose becomes the starting point, furniture stops being a purchase and becomes part of the learning strategy.

Every Space Has a Job

Higher education campuses are unlike almost any other environment. Within a single day, one building may support lectures, seminars, independent study, faculty collaboration, research, student services, social interaction, and community events. A student commons may be a quiet study lounge at 9:00 a.m., a bustling gathering space by noon, and an evening event venue just hours later. A classroom may shift from lecture to collaborative learning several times before the day is over. Libraries have become destinations for teamwork as much as independent study. Makerspaces encourage experimentation. Music facilities require organization, accessibility, and protection for valuable equipment while maximizing instructional time.

Every one of those spaces serves a different purpose. Yet too often, institutions begin by asking what furniture belongs in the room instead of what the room is meant to accomplish. The question facilities leaders should be asking isn't, "What furniture belongs here?" It's "What behaviors should this environment encourage?" Because behavior is ultimately what learning environments are designed to support.

The Hidden Curriculum of Space

Educational researchers have long understood something many people overlook: The environment influences behavior.

At Marco, working alongside internationally recognized educational consultant Dr. Lennie Scott-Webber, we've seen firsthand that the most successful learning environments begin with understanding people before products. How do students move through a room? Where do conversations naturally happen? What encourages participation? What reduces stress? What helps people focus? These aren't abstract design questions. They're practical ones.

The shape of a table influences conversation. The layout of a room influences interaction. Mobility encourages adaptability. Comfort supports concentration. Choice encourages ownership.

Even subtle design decisions communicate how people are expected to use a space. The environment is constantly teaching. The most successful campuses recognize that—and design accordingly.

The Research Is Clear

The evidence is no longer anecdotal. Decades of environmental psychology, neuroscience, and educational research continue to point to the same conclusion: space influences behavior, and behavior influences outcomes.

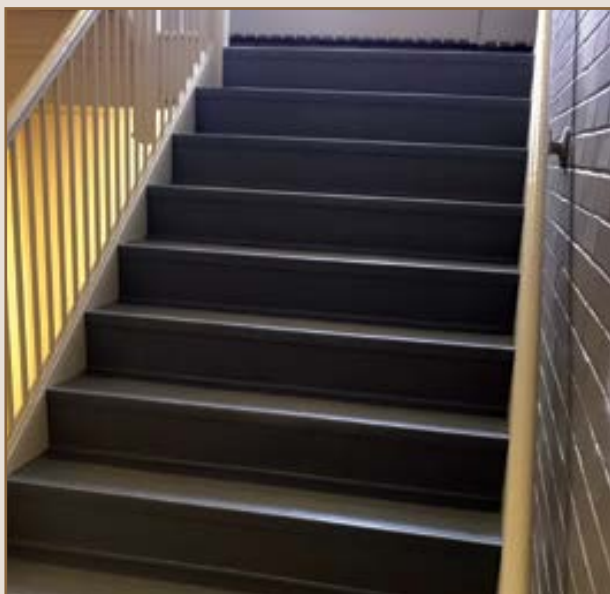
One of the most widely referenced studies in educational design, the University of Salford's HEAD Project, found that classroom design accounted for up to 16 percent of the variation in student learning progress.

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Think about that for a moment.

If a curriculum improvement demonstrated a 16 percent impact on learning, educators would pay attention. If a new instructional strategy consistently moved student outcomes by that amount, institutions would invest in it. Yet the physical environment—where learning happens every single day—is often treated as the final purchasing decision instead of an educational strategy.

Research continues to reinforce that students perform best when learning environments provide comfort, accessibility, visibility, movement, and opportunities for both collaboration and focused individual work.

Just as important is choice and control. When students can choose where and how they work—whether it's a quiet corner for concentration, a collaborative table for problem-solving, or an informal space for discussion—they become more engaged in the learning process. Research in neuroscience and educational psychology continues to show that learner choice and agency strengthen attention, motivation, memory, and long-term retention. Simply put, when students have greater

ownership over their learning environment, they are more likely to engage deeply with the work taking place within it.

The goal isn't simply flexibility. It's creating environments that give people the freedom to learn the way they learn best.

Flexibility Isn't Furniture on Casters

"Flexible learning" has become one of higher education's favorite phrases. But flexibility isn't measured by how easily a table rolls across the floor. Real flexibility begins with intentionality. Can the room support multiple teaching styles? Can students quickly transition from lecture to collaboration? Can the environment evolve without replacing everything five years from now? Can faculty teach differently tomorrow than they do today?

Those are the questions that matter. Furniture should never dictate how learning happens. It should quietly support whatever the moment requires. The best environments don't force people to adapt to the furniture. The furniture adapts to the people.

From K to Gray

One way to think about this philosophy is "K

to Gray." Over decades of serving educational environments, we've discovered something surprisingly simple. The context of learning changes. Human behavior doesn't. Whether we're designing for a first grader, a doctoral candidate, or an adult learner returning to the classroom, the goal is remarkably consistent: create environments where people feel comfortable, capable, connected, and ready to learn.

While the context evolves, the fundamental needs of learners do not.

Partnership Doesn't Begin at Installation

Ask any facilities professional what keeps projects from opening on time, and the answer is rarely furniture. Until suddenly it is. Construction schedules move. Shipments are delayed. Specifications change. Manufacturers miss commitments. Occupancy dates don't. Those are the moments that define partnerships.

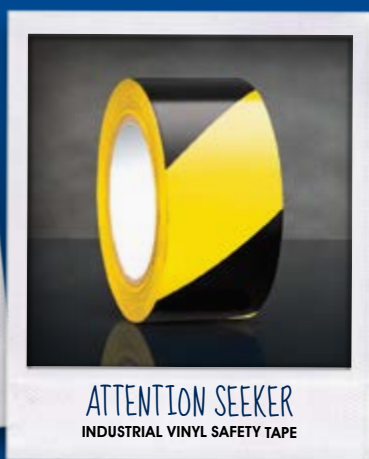
In our experience, many of the strongest customer relationships begin with a simple phone call: "Can you help?" Sometimes we're asked to solve a problem another

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manufacturer couldn't. Sometimes a timeline has unexpectedly compressed. Sometimes a project simply needs a partner willing to respond quickly, communicate honestly, and work toward a solution. Responsiveness isn't a customer service initiative. It's part of our culture.

Because when a building is preparing to open, students aren't thinking about furniture. They're thinking about the semester ahead. Faculty are preparing lessons. Facilities teams are working tirelessly to cross the finish line. Our responsibility is to help them get there.

Relationships Outlast Projects

The best partnerships aren't measured by purchase orders. They're measured by trust. Installation may complete a project, but it should begin a relationship—one built on responsiveness, collaboration, and a shared commitment to creating environments where students and educators can succeed.

Many of the institutions we serve first found us because they needed someone willing to step in, solve a challenge, and deliver on a

promise. They stayed because they discovered something different. A team that answers the phone. People who communicate honestly. A manufacturer that understands educational environments—not just educational furniture.

The strongest partnerships rarely begin with perfect circumstances. More often, they begin with someone needing help. Over time, those projects become relationships built on trust, responsiveness, and shared success. The best partners aren't remembered simply for the products they delivered—they're remembered for how they showed up when it mattered most. Relationships outlast projects. That's how trust is built.

Begin with Purpose

Higher education continues to evolve. Teaching methods will change. Technology will advance. Programs will grow. Student expectations will continue to shift. The campuses best prepared for that future won't simply have newer furniture. They'll have environments intentionally designed to support the people using them.

The next time your institution begins planning a classroom, library, commons, makerspace, or learning environment, start with one question. What should this space accomplish? Everything else follows.

Before the professor says a word...Before students open a laptop...Before learning begins...The environment has already started teaching.

That's why the question isn't, "What furniture should we buy?" It's, "What should this space help people achieve?" Because great campuses don't begin with furniture. They begin with intention.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Libby Ferin leads marketing at Marco Group, bringing expertise in customer engagement and strategic communications to strengthen relationships, elevate brand experiences, and drive growth.

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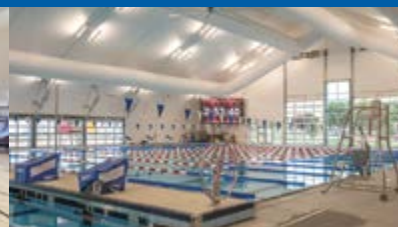
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